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ABSTRACT

A study compared writing scores and attitudes of second grade students in a traditional writing classroom and a writing process classroom. Subjects, 25 second-grade students in a writing process classroom and 26 students in a traditional classroom from the same rural school, were instructed in their respective classrooms for 6 months. Most students were Caucasian and the majority were from low-income families. Subjects were interviewed at the end of the school year concerning their attitudes about writing. Subjects' writing achievement was measured using a sample writing project presented to the teachers as an example of the Stanford Achievement Test in writing. Results indicated that subjects who received the writing process instruction obtained significantly higher writing scores than did those receiving traditional instruction. Results also indicated that more students in the writing process class than in the traditional classroom considered themselves writers, believed that they learned to write from their teachers, placed emphasis on thinking and learning from mistakes, and indicated a purpose for writing. (Six tables of data are included; 34 references are attached.) (RS)

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Writing Process versus Traditional Writing Classrooms: Writing Ability and Attitudes of Second Grade Students

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Submitted to:

Mid-South Educational Research Association

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The traditional approach of teaching writing has recently come under criticism by experts in the field of language arts (Atwell, 1987; Goodman, 1986, 1989, 1989). Researchers are finding more and more reasons to discontinue the skills workbook and drill and practice sheets (Varble, 1990). In the traditional approach to writing, the emphasis is on the mechanics of punctuation, capitalization, and grammar skills rather than the content of the students' writing. According to Calkins (1985, p. 26), "Only 3% of the school day is actually spent on composing." Varble (1990) found in her study of second and sixth graders' writing samples that over 40% of the school day is spent in exercises requiring only a recorded response with no composing involved. A study by Sunflower and Crawford (1985) indicates one-third of the elementary teachers instruct in writing only one or more times a week, and two- thirds give little or no instruction in writing (less than once a week).

Professional educators are endorsing a trend away from a skills curriculum (Britton, 1989; Calkins & Harwayne, 1987; Cambourne and Turbill, 1990; Gentry, 1987; Goodman, 1989; Lamme, 1989; Smith, 1986). However, students are still evaluated by standardized tests which are based on skills instruction from the traditional approach. This can create a dilemma for the classroom teacher. There is, however, some preliminary evidence (Maxwell, unpublished) indicating that a writing process approach can enhance student performance on standardized tests.

The basis of this study was to compare writing scores of two groups of second grade students: one group in a writing process classroom and the other in a traditional classroom. The evaluation tool of the two second grade classrooms was a sample writing project simulating the Stanford Achievement Test in writing that all second grade students will take beginning in the spring of 1992. These scores were a basis of comparison of 25 second grade students instructed in process writing and 26 second grade students from a

traditional classroom that were chosen at random in the same school.

Statement of Problems

Will second grade students who receive instruction in the writing process method score significantly higher on a sample writing project than second grade students who receive traditional skills method instruction? Will the writing process students or the traditionally instructed students exhibit more critical perception and understanding about their writing in a writing attitude survey?

Significance of Problems

Theory and research support the writing process approach. The writing process approach is consistent with understandings of how children learn and it is believed the quality of students' writing will improve when teachers instruct writing using writing process methods (DWorkin, 1979; Goodman, 1986; Graves, 1983; Wagner, 1990).

A current dilemma in many school systems is that the curriculum being used in writing is contrary to recent theory and research in the teaching of writing.

It is hoped this study will be an instrument toward implementation of a writing process curriculum in the system from which it was based.

Research Hypotheses

There will be a significant difference in test scores of second grade students instructed in the approach of writing process on the sample writing project, than test scores of students instructed in the traditional approach of writing methods.

There will be a significant difference in the attitudes on writing of the second grade students instructed in the writing process approach, and attitudes of students instructed in the traditional approach of writing.

Definition of Terms

(Varble, 1990)

Process Writing	Traditional
Whole to parts emphasized	Parts to whole emphasized
Process not important	Product most important
Language learning based on experience	Language learning based on hierarchy of skills
Learners use writing for a purpose	Learners use writing to satisfy others

Need - Writing - Skills	Skills - Writing - Need
Language is learned through social contact	Language learned through skills
Students choose topics	Teacher chooses topics
Invented spelling is encouraged	Correct spelling emphasized
Evaluation is informal	Evaluation is formal

Assumptions

The following assumptions are made in this study.

1. Students instructed in process writing will score significantly higher in writing, when content of composition is considered, than students instructed in the traditional approach.
2. The sample writing project is similar in form to the Stanford Achievement Test in writing to be used in the second grade.
3. The sample writing project is reliable and valid for use in the second grade.
4. Students instructed in process writing will display more critical perception and insight about their writing in a writing attitude survey than

the students instructed in the traditional skills method.

Delimitations

1. Students receiving treatment were assigned at the beginning of the year to classroom by administration.
2. School in which research was conducted is considered low-middle socio-economically.
3. Teacher personality/style may have some impact in the instructional process.

Summary

The methods of writing instruction have long been a topic of interest to teachers, researchers and other professional educators. Two major views are the traditional approach and process writing.

The traditional approach is a product oriented, hierarchy of skills, worksheets, and parts-to-whole approach to writing where the emphasis is on correctness and formal evaluation. The writing process is based on a need to communicate, purposeful writing, and authorship where process is emphasized and evaluation is informal.

Professional educators are endorsing a curriculum of writing using the writing process approach. However, students in most programs are still evaluated by standardized tests for national surveys. This evaluation method is cause for this study. This research will consider the instructional method mentioned as the independent variable when discussing the scores on the sample writing project.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The purpose of the review of literature is to explore the concepts of process writing and those of the traditional approach and to evaluate how these theories impact learning in the classroom. Consideration is given to the procedures of instruction in the writing process classroom and to the reasons why this type of teaching constitutes an entirely different type of evaluation than traditional methods.

What is a Writing Process Classroom?

Language is only language when it is used as a communicative instrument in a natural and social context (Goodman, Ken and Yetta, 1983). The process writing classroom promotes language with a communicative purpose: the sharing of experiences and ideas with others. Children write on self selected topics in a risk-free environment. Their writings are shared, edited, published and evaluated by teacher and peer conferencing (Calkins, 1983).

Process writing classrooms are classrooms for authors. Students learn to take ownership of their

writings. Many writing activities, such as journal writing, conferencing, writing about writing, (theirs and peers), stories, pen pal letters, writing folders, class news articles, writing response activities, or a message for the bulletin board, all immerse the child in purposeful writing events. (Harste, Short and Burke; 1988).

Too often the writing tasks in a classroom are encountered only for the purpose of satisfying a grade requirement, not for the purpose of communication. Reading and writing both develop in relation to their specific function and use (Goodman, Ken and Yetta, 1983). When all of the language arts (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are incorporated into the classroom so each makes a genuine contribution, then language has been tied to learning as powerfully as possible (Britton, 1989).

Procedures of Process Writing

In a writing process classroom, students choose their own topics, share ideas, and make decisions in teacher-student and peer conferences. The student

learns to view writing as a process and their writing as true authorship (James, 1982).

All educators have their own individual methods of achieving a writing, learning environment, but there are guidelines and principles agreed upon by experts in this field (Graves, Hansen, 1983; Hansen, 1987; Henkin, 1984; Silver, 1989; Wright, 1981). They are as follows:

1. Students are given time daily for writing.
2. Teachers model reading and writing.
3. Students are immersed in language, literature, and environmental print.
4. Students and teachers utilize conference time.
5. Skills are taught in context as children have use for them.
6. Evaluation is informal, conducted by the teacher as well as students' self evaluation.

Children must be given time to write daily and indeed throughout the day. They should be given a minimum of 30 minutes in an uninterrupted block of time; however, most agree 45 to 60 minutes is best (Calkins, Harwayne, 1987; Goodman, 1986; Hansen, 1987;

Toliver, 1990). According to Graves (1985), experts believe students' writing is improved when more time is spent on composition and less time on isolated skills. As teachers model the skills of writing, editing, and publishing, children learn more about language usage and begin to see themselves as authors (Gentry, 1987).

Children learn form and usage of language by the print around them. Writers need easy access to resource materials and writing supplies. Writers are immersed in literature and environmental print. Familiarization in written material is important because children are enveloped in environmental print (Newkirk, 1985; Toliver, 1990). Children in this non-threatening learning atmosphere respond to opportunities to participate in writing that is relevant to their needs of learning how print works (Cambourne, Turbill, 1987).

Conferencing is an important part of the process of writing. In the teacher-student conference, mini-lessons on skills or phonics can be taught within the context of the writing. Teachers respond to students' writing, listen to ideas, offer direction, and help set

goals (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, Harvayne, 1987; Graves, 1983; Silver, 1989; Wright, 1981).

Evaluation Methods

Two methods of writing evaluation used most frequently in writing process classrooms are students' self evaluation and teacher evaluation (Atwell, 1987). These and other methods of assessment are informal in nature, meaning there are no skill sheets evaluating a specific skill (Toliver, 1990). These types of evaluations are more directed to analysis of an individual's growth and ability. Although teachers are saturated with writing test scores, the information about a student's achievement in writing is almost useless when the data are examined. "No one can determine the relative ranking of the writing ability of an individual student or group of students in the same grade throughout the nation" (McCraig, 1982, p. 2).

Traditional methods of assessment are not appropriate in the writing process classroom. Writing process promotes a knowledgeable human-as-instrument evaluation (Cambourne, Turbill, 1990). In the writing

process classroom, the evaluator is involved in the student's daily writing activities as an observer, instructor, and assessor. Due to the variety of individual language growth, the instructor often uses a checklist and/or narrative form in the day to day assessment (Cambourne, Turbill, 1990; Fox, 1988; Graves, 1985; Harp, 1988; Schwartz, 1987). This allows for assessment to be process oriented rather than product oriented. Process looks at the growth and improvement of the writing process. Product examines the improvement in a specific skill (Harp, 1988).

Varble's study (1990) of second grade students who were taught for one year using the writing process approach shows students produced better writing samples when evaluated on content. These students were not evaluated on a standardized test, which is most often the instrument used to evaluate students and teachers. Assessment of writing process must reflect the writing process philosophy (Goodman, 1986; Harp, 1988). "Unfortunately, success of failure in this area is often judged by a standardized and/or criterion

referenced tests" (Manning, Manning, & Kamil, 1988, p. 7).

Teachers of writing process are backed by theory, practice, and research (Goodman, 1989; Wagner, 1989). Experts share a belief that writing process classrooms have a more favorable curriculum as a whole than the typical American classroom (Britton, 1989).

In the past 10 to 15 years, writing process has spread with favorable reports and research statistics across America. Many educators have applied its principles in their classrooms and schools. Some systems have developed a writing process philosophy. Still, educators continue evaluation in standardized skill and product based tests as a source of students' abilities in writing.

Summary

The teaching of writing in today's schools is leaving the traditional approach of punctuation and skills and moving toward a holistic approach of writing for meaning and content of composition. However, students are still evaluated by standardized tests which are based upon a skills instruction curricula.

There are indications that writing process students' performance of standardized tests may actually be enhanced. This may be due to the natural communicative aspects of writing process classrooms that represent real life settings for writing such as classrooms immersed in literature and environmental print.

In writing process classrooms students choose their own topics, utilize teachers and peers conference, and learn the pride of authorship. Students are given 30 to 60 minutes of uninterrupted writing time daily, and evaluation is usually an informal checklist type. This is a major change from the traditional writing classroom where writing is encountered on skills sheets to satisfy a grade or an instruction requirement and not for the purpose of communication.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The design for this study is a quasi-experimental design. This section provides details of the following elements: 1) sampling technique, 2) instrumentation, 3) experimental design, 4) procedure, 5) evaluation methods, and 6) statistical analysis procedure.

Sampling Procedure

The subjects for this study were two intact second grade classrooms in a rural county school system. The majority of students were from low socio-economic incomes as indicated by the poverty income guidelines from the Department of Health and Human Services issued Feb. 1989. (See Table 1) Most were caucasian and participants in the free lunch program.

Insert Table 1 here

The experimental group was composed of 25 children, the control group consisted of 26 students from another intact classroom which was picked at random. All students involved were assigned to

teachers at the beginning of the school year by the administration.

Instrumentation

The measurement instrument used to assess the dependent variable in the experiment was a sample writing project presented to second grade teachers as an example of the Stanford Achievement Test in writing that will be administered to second grade students in 1992.

Experimental Design

The paradigm of the design chosen for this study is presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

Instructional Procedures

The experimental group was instructed in writing, using the process writing philosophy for 6 months prior to taking the Stanford Achievement Test writing sample in the spring of 1991. The students were given a block of writing time of between 30 to 45 minutes every day for writing. This time was for journal writing or writing in their notebooks. The writing notebooks

contain a variety of genre: stories, plays, poems, commercials, and others. The writing notebook materials were discussed in conferences (teacher and peer) and were edited. Not all pieces of writing were brought to the "published" stage, only those agreed upon by student and teacher to be published. The books were then shared in the classroom, with other classes, and at home.

The control group was taught language, using the traditional skills method. In this method, the class as a whole covered a particular skill in the language book and a skill sheet from the workbook. The skills approach is a form of "mechanics only" writing. The content of any writing is examined only for correct application of the skill or for whatever the desired product was in the lesson.

In all other areas of content, the experimental group and control group were instructed in a traditional manner. The two instructors also used the same textbooks and evaluation methods in the other content areas.

Evaluation Methods

The ability to express thoughts in writing was evaluated, using criteria developed by the Avon Grove School District, West Grove, Pennsylvania (Nessel, Jones, & Dixon; 1989). The criteria included seven levels. Level 1 the lowest, to Level 7 the highest. There were two raters. Each rater graded each writing sample individually. Where there was a difference in their scores, the two raters were asked to rate until they agreed, giving each writing a single score.

LEVEL 1

Garble, absence of any reconstructable thought.

LEVEL 2

One to three thoughts, possibly mixed with garble; some reconstruction necessary.

LEVEL 3

At least three related thoughts requiring minimal reconstruction.

LEVEL 4

Level 3 criteria, plus:

a sense of relatedness with movement of thought through the writing, or a summary idea

LEVEL 5

Level 4 criteria, plus:

at least one complex sentence, and development of one or more good ideas

LEVEL 6

Level 5 criteria, plus:

elaboration on idea(s), and one item from the list of desirable characteristics (below)

LEVEL 7

Level 6 criteria, plus two items from the list of desirable characteristics (below)

DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS

an attempt to communicate with the reader (such as addressing the reader directly)

imaginative/creative qualities

exceptional vocabulary

figurative language

humor

expression of feelings

introduction of character

a literary device, such as dialogue or a parenthetical expression

Statistical Analysis Procedures

The hypotheses for this study were evaluated in the following manner. The scores from the writing projects were collected and compared for the difference between the medians of the two groups. Each group's writing samples were analyzed to produce a range of the number of words and sentences used. The students in each group were interviewed in a writing attitude survey concerning their ideas about themselves as writers.

Summary

The subjects for this study were two intact second grade classrooms. These students were from a low socio-economic county school system. The experimental and control groups consisted of 25 students and 26 students, respectfully.

The measurement instrument used to assess the dependent variable was a sample writing project. The experimental group was instructed in writing for six months in a writing process environment. The control group was instructed in writing using traditional

skills methods. The groups were instructed in a similar manner in all other areas of the curriculum.

The hypotheses formulated in this study were evaluated by collecting and comparing writing scores between the two groups and a survey of writing attitudes.

Results

The results are presented in two sections: Findings concerning students' ability to express thoughts in writing and their ideas about themselves as writers.

Writing Ability

The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine the mean rank between the experimental group and the control group, as the data were ordinal. In Table 3, it can be noted that the mean rank of the experimental group was substantially higher than the mean rank of the control group. This difference was statistically significant, indicating that students who received the writing process instruction obtained significantly higher writing scores than did those receiving the traditional instruction.

Insert Table 3 here

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the two groups. Each writing sample received a score from levels 1 to 7.

As can be noted in Table 4, no children in the experimental group received a score of level 1 or 2, and only the experimental group received scores from level 7. The experimental group scored 65% of their total scores between level 5 and 7. The control group scored 38.4% of their scores on levels 5 and 6, they received no level 1 or 7 scores.

Insert Table 4 here

As can be noted in Table 5, words and sentence usage in the experimental group covered a wider range than that of the control group. The experimental group's mean of words was between 26-60, compared to those of the control groups's mean which was between 18-40 words.

Insert Table 5 here

Ideas About Writing

At the end of the school year, both groups of students were individually interviewed by the researcher. All questions concerned their ideas about their writing. All were asked the same questions in a neutral environment. A preface was stated to each to establish that these questions had no right or wrong answers; this was not a test and would not be graded. The questions were about how they thought of themselves as writers, not as in handwriting or penmanship, but as an author of stories, poems, and letters.

The questions were as follows: Are you a writer? How did you learn to write? What do you think a good writer needs to do in order to write well? How do you feel about what you write? and why do people write?

Insert Table 6 here

A discernable difference between the two groups' self image as writers was established when they were

asked, Are you a writer? In the experimental group, 19 said yes, 4 said no. In the control group, 6 said yes, and 19 said no, they did not perceive themselves as writers. When asked, How did you learn to write?, the majority of the writing process students answered "teacher or school." The majority of the traditional classroom children answered, "from their parents." On the question, What do you think a good writer needs to do in order to write well?, they equally agreed practice was important. Nearly half of the skills group (10 students) placed emphasis on skills such as writing neatly, following directions, not messing up, and studying hard. Seven students in the experimental group placed emphasis on thinking and learning from mistakes, compared to only one student in the traditional skills group.

When asked How do you feel about what you write?, all the experimental group students expressed happiness. In the control group, 11 students expressed happiness, except for 4 who said they felt sad or bad. On the question, Why do people write?, more of the writing process students (21 of 23) gave answers that

indicated a purpose for writing such as: learning, authorship, enjoyment, and communication than did the skills students (15 of 25).

Table 1

1989 Poverty Income Guidelines For All States (Except Alaska and Hawaii) and the District of Columbia

Size of family unit	Poverty Guideline
1	$ 5,980
2	8,020
3	10,060
4	12,100
5	14,140
6	16,180
7	18,220
8	20,260

For family units with more than 8 members, add $2,040 for each additional member.

Dated: February 9, 1989

Table 2

Experimental Design

Group	n	Independent Variable	S.A.T.
E	25	X	T1
C	26	*	T1

E: Experimental Group

C: Control Group

n: Number of students from each classroom

T1: S.A.T. Writing Sample for second grade

X: Writing instruction using process writing approach

*: Writing instruction using traditional approach

Table 3

Mean Rank of Writing Scores

Groups	n	Mean Rank	P
Experimental	25	31.45	.0076
Control	26	20.67	

Table 4

Writing Sample Scores

Levels	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Experi-mental Group			2	7	6	6	4	25
			8.0	28.0	24.0	24.0	16.0	49.0
Control Group		2	9	5	5	5		26
		7.7	34.6	19.2	19.2	19.2		51.0
Total n each Level		2	11	12	11	11	4	51
Percent each Level		3.9	21.6	23.5	21.6	21.6	7.8	100

Table 5

Words and Sentences on Writing Sample

Group	Words	Sentences
Experimental:	18-130	2-18
Mean:	26-60	5
Control:	14-80	1-10
Mean:	18-40	5

Table 6

Ideas about Writing: Second Grade

Type of Response		Writing Process	Skills
Are you a writer?	Yes	19	6
	No	4	19
How did you learn to write?			
	my parents	3	11
	teacher/school	15	8
	I just knew	2	
	practice	1	1
	don't know/ unrelated response	2	5
What do you think a good writer needs to do in order to write well?			
	learn from mistakes	5	1
	practice	11	11
	think	2	
	take your time	1	1
	write neatly		6
	follow directions		2
	don't mess up		1

Table 6 continued

Type of Response	Process	Skills
study hard		
unrelated resonse	4	1
How do you feel about what you write?		
good/happy	23	21
sad		3
bad		1
Why do people write?		
education/learn	9	3
to be an author	3	2
fun/enjoyment	7	6
communication	2	4
to learn to spell/write		4
have to		1
don't know/ unrelated response	2	6

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